

VICTIM SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

2008
ANNUAL REPORT



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

VICTIM SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

Montgomery County, Maryland
2008 Annual Report
Advocating for the Victims of Crime

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<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhstmpl.asp?url=/content/hhs/vasap/advbrd.asp>

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Advisory Board)

MISSION STATEMENT

To support Montgomery County's commitment to serving victims of crime, including rape, domestic violence, sexual assault, homicide survivors, adults molested as children, terrorism, hate violence, robbery, driving while intoxicated (DWI) and vehicular manslaughter, assault, battery, burglary, arson, larceny, stalking, carjacking, purse snatching, harassment and vandalism.

MANDATE

The Board must periodically review available services and facilities for victims and their families; determine needs of the victim and family services/programs; submit at least one report annually to the County Executive and County Council on the progress of programs to victims and their families along with the actions needed to improve those programs; make recommendations for appropriate allocation of funds in accordance with agreed upon priorities and consideration of financial resources. The Board also assists the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services in the development of the annual victim services and families plan, and acts as a local advocate for victim services programming.

Montgomery County Code -- Art. VII, Section 24-56.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, SAMANTHA DAVIS

It is with great enthusiasm that I greet you on behalf of the Victim Services Advisory Board ("Board") We have worked tirelessly this year to advocate on the behalf of all Montgomery County's victims and their families. A major part of this year's work has been identifying ways to tackle the issue of bullying in schools and to serve as a voice for those who are often unheard or ignored. Additionally, we have worked on the issue of insuring that the resources available in Montgomery County are offered to any student in the public school system who reports that they have been victimized by a fellow student. With this in mind, we have remained vocal in our efforts to inform the County Council about the importance of improving the County's reporting and referral mechanisms for the overall well-being and safety of each student residing in Montgomery County.

We will continue to make sure that these improvements are sustained, but as we enter the New Year we do so with many goals in mind. Chief among them is to make certain that all county offices and those within County Government maintain the resources necessary to serve the community. It is our strong belief that the positions currently held should be protected even in these tough economic times, because it is known that in such times there is increased need for these vital services and we cannot afford to under-fund or cut access to them.

Additionally, we will be working to assess each area where victims are helped, so that by this time next year, we will be able to give an even more accurate assessment of how those who give and receive services in this county view the resources being provided. We are truly a Board that can ably give advice on how our peers in the community should be served.

On behalf of the Board, I thank you for this opportunity to share our Report as we hope it will positively impact our community.

Sincerely,
Samantha Y. Davis, Chair
Victim Services Advisory Board

MEETINGS AND MEMBERSHIP

MEETINGS

The Board meets the fourth Thursday of each month, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., at the Office of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, 1301 Piccard Drive, Fourth Floor Conference Room, Rockville, Maryland 20850. The Board does not meet in August and combines its November and December sessions into one meeting. All meetings are open to the public.

MEMBERSHIP

Arleen Anderson
Kim Barry
Toni Zollicoffer-Brown
Samantha Davis
Debbie Kempl
Pascale Leone

Lester Stano (Clergy)
Parker OShea
Mathew Quinn
William C. Smith Jr.
Beverly Stern

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERSHIP

Ellen Alexander (Police)
Ethel Burnett (SAO)
Nadja Cabello
Eugene Morris
Dudley Warner (HHS)

FORMER MEMBERS 2008

Graziella Benenati Costanzo
Jennifer Cromwell
Yvonne Hanniford
Michelle Kendrick
Monica Kinney
Krista McKim
David Orochena
Richard Robinson

MAJOR ISSUES

Youth Victims Reporting Outreach

In 2007, the Board became aware that Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) does not identify students as either "aggressor" or "victim" in their database when tracking and reporting disciplinary issues among students. The MCPS system does not make this distinction even when one student's actions can be identified as "aggressive" or "predatory" such as in cases of bullying, stalking or other instances that have an identified perpetrator and an identified victim of crime.

The Board's goal in working with MCPS is to provide better services to youth victims by helping service providers target their programming to meet the needs of youth victims and to be able to better educate victims and their families of available resources. We met with MCPS on several occasions to encourage the school system to begin tracking and reporting youth victims attending MCPS. After many unsuccessful attempts to get MCPS to cooperate with this initiative, the Board sought the assistance of the County Council. During 2007 and 2008, Board members met with each Council representative and asked that they support our efforts. As a result of these meetings, the Board received overwhelming support from the County Council. The late Honorable Marilyn Praisner, on behalf of the County Council wrote a letter of support for the Board's efforts, and strongly encouraged MCPS to cooperate with our recommendations. While MCPS has yet to begin tracking and reporting youth victims, the Board will continue our work in the upcoming year. We look forward to meeting with Stephen Zagami, the MCPS Director of the Department of Student Services, to seek support to systematically track and report youth victims in Montgomery County Public Schools.

Continued...

Outreach to Crime Victims in Public Schools

In 2008, a priority for the Board was the issue of bullying among our younger school population. Recognizing that bullying in schools is a nationwide problem that can have negative consequences for not only the student victim(s) involved, but for the school and community as a whole. In 2008 the Board worked toward developing an educational outreach and awareness messaging campaign geared toward students in Montgomery County schools to inform them of the many services available for victims of bullying, abuse, sexual assault, and other crimes.

Understanding that that bullying affects more than 5 million students in grades 6 through 11 the Board sought to focus on school-aged children between grades six and eight. In doing so, the Board identified 30,000 public middle school students as a target audience to provide information about the victims' services available to them in Montgomery County. Our goal is to create a visual messaging piece – such as a poster – that could deliver the message in a simple and youth-appealing manner. The Board invested considerable time examining this issue and received information from various interested allies. The project involved partnering with the Montgomery County Police Department to write a grant proposal to provide school materials with effective messaging to help counter bullying and provide information on how to obtain services for victims.

The Board formed a subcommittee that then examined multiple avenues including potential funders and project partners from the public and private sectors. During the planning phase of the marketing and outreach project on bullying, the subcommittee members met with representatives from the Youth Services Department of the YMCA. The YMCA agreed to work with the Board on the anti-bullying campaign targeting Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). YMCA, once funding for the project is secured, agreed to help design the media kit with the assistance of MCPS students who are participants in their after school programs. YMCA also agreed to partner with the Board on educating students and teachers on how to address bullying and how to effectively identify and provide resources to the targeted audience.

However, due to the current status of the economy and its affect on overall spending, the Board has agreed to defer this project until 2009 when the improved budget forecasts would enable better support for Montgomery County citizens who are the victims of such crimes.

The Board also applauds the Maryland General Assembly and Governor O'Malley for passing comprehensive anti-bullying legislation introduced by Delegate Craig Rice (former VSAB Board member) in 2008.

INVESTIGATION OF DELAY IN PROCESSING CLAIMS WITH CICB

Late in 2008, it came to the attention of the Board that there has been a substantial setback in the processing of claims to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board (CICB) that impacts only victims living in, or who were victimized while visiting, Montgomery County. It is the Board's understanding that victims have been complaining, not only to CICB staff but also to those advocates who assist them in Montgomery County, that their calls to determine the status of their claims have not been returned, and their claims have not been paid. Victim advocates throughout Montgomery County also voice the same frustration that they have tried, some since March, 2008, to verify the status of cases and their repeated calls are rarely returned.

Board Chair, Samantha Davis, wrote to Mrs. Shirley Haas, Victims' Rights Compliance Coordinator within the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention office, to request her immediate investigation of these situations, and then provide the Board with her report about why these claims have been ignored/mis-handled, with her office's immediate response about correcting this situation so that victims claims may be processed.

Under Maryland's Victims Rights laws, victims have a right to receive help with expenses occurring as a result of the crime. The Board believes that the long delay in processing claims for Montgomery County crime victims is in fact a violation of this law and these victims' rights. With that in mind, the Board will continue to seek an explanation as to why this delay occurred as well as immediate action from the Victims' Rights Compliance office until we are assured that this matter is resolved.

BUDGET PRIORITIES FOR 2009

The mission of the Board is to support Montgomery County's commitment to serving victims of crime. In these difficult budgetary times, victim services should not be reduced because they are part of the County government's fundamental responsibilities.

Additionally, growth in the County population, particularly within the immigrant and non-English speaking community, has resulted in a greater need for these services and will therefore require additional funds, staff, and resources to meet these ever-increasing needs.

With that, the Board has outline five areas as budgetary priorities for calendar year 2009:

1. Abused Persons Program:

- Transitional housing (and/or increased shelter) for domestic violence victims, particularly undocumented immigrants
- Additional workers to reduce waitlist for offender counseling

2. Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program

- Spanish and French speaking case workers to serve waitlist for torture victims
- A courthouse-based victim advocate

3. Police

- County vehicle to transport victims

4. State Attorney's Office

- Funds for lost wages, meals and transportation for victims testifying in court and parents of juvenile victims

5. Sheriff's Office

- Ensure that federal grant funding for prosecution/victim services continues to be funded

ATTENDANCE AT EXTERNAL MEETINGS & TRAININGS

February

The County Council Hearing on Youth Victims & MCPS

March 3

Meeting with County Exec on Budget Priorities

July

Council HHS Committee Hearing with Boards and Commissions

November

Meeting with HHS Director

Samantha Davis was nominated as the Board Representative to the Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council (AAODAC)

Samantha Davis was nominated as the Board Representative to the Criminal Justice Coordinating Commission (CJCC)

GUEST SPEAKERS

Throughout the year, various victim services experts made insightful educational presentations to the Board. Of special note, as it pertained to our outreach project was the presentation done by Dr. Jorge Srabstein of the Children's National Medical Centre on his research into the incidence, prevalence and effects of bullying. Dr. Srabstein's recommended that the Board advocate for: the development of a community awareness campaign on bullying, effective policies to prevent the incidence of bullying, and for increased services addressing the effects of bullying across one's lifespan.

In addition, Stefan LoBuglio, Chief Director of the Montgomery County Pre-Release and Reentry Services (PRRS) presented before the Board the important work of the Pre-release Center and new policies for the Center with regard to victims. The PRRS Division provides residential and non-residential reentry services to convicted and sentenced individuals who are within 12 months of release and who have been incarcerated in the county's correctional system.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Eugene Morris and Yvonne Hanniford are the staff support for the Board. Nadja Cabello also continues to attend Board meetings and assists with the Board.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

Special thanks to our past chairs who participated during the 2008 calendar year, Monica Kinney and Richard Robinson.